



SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I.—Major Amberson had made a fortune in 1874 when other people were losing fortunes, and the magnificence of the Ambersons began then. Major Amberson laid out a 250-acre "development," with roads and statuary, and in the center of a four-acre tract, on Amberson avenue, built for himself the most magnificent mansion the Midland City had ever seen.

CHAPTER II.—When the major's daughter married young Wilbur Minafer the neighbors predicted that as Isabel could never really love Wilbur all her love would be bestowed upon the children. There was only one child, however, George Amberson Minafer, but his upbringing and his youthful accomplishments as a mischief maker were quite in keeping with the most pessimistic predictions.

CHAPTER III.—By the time George went away to college he did not attempt to conceal his belief that the Ambersons were about the most important family in the world. At a ball given in his honor when he returned from college, George introduced Lucy Morgan, a stranger and the prettiest girl present, and got on famously with her until he learned that a "queer looking duck" at whom he had been poking much fun, was the young lady's father. He was Eugene Morgan, a former resident of Bigburg, and he was returning there to erect a factory and to build horseless carriages of his own invention.

CHAPTER IV.—Eugene was an old admirer of Isabel's and they had been engaged when Isabel threw him over because of some youthful indiscretion and married Wilbur Minafer.

CHAPTER V.

Having thus, in a word, revealed his ambition for a career above courts, marts and polling booths, George breathed more deeply than usual, and, turning his face from the lovely companion whom he had just made his confidant, gazed out at the dancers with an expression in which there was both sternness and a contempt for the squalid lives of the unyachted Midlanders before him. However, among them he marked his mother, and his somber grandeur relaxed momentarily; a more genial light came into his eyes.

Isabel was dancing with the queer-looking duck; and it was to be noted that the lively gentleman's gait was more sedate than it had been with Miss Fanny Minafer, but not less dexterous and authoritative. He saw George and the beautiful Lucy on the stairway and nodded to them. George waved his hand vaguely; he had a momentary return of that inexplicable uneasiness and resentment which had troubled him down stairs.

"How lovely your mother is!" Lucy said.

"I think she is," he agreed gently. "She's the gracefulst woman in that ballroom. How wonderfully they dance together!"

"Who?"

"Your mother and—and the queer-looking duck," said Lucy. "I'm going to dance with him pretty soon."

"I don't care—so long as you don't give him one of the numbers that belong to me."

"I'll try to remember," she said, and thoughtfully lifted to her face the bouquet of violets and lilies, a gesture which George noted without approval.

"Look here! Who sent you those flowers you keep makin' such a fuss over?"

"He did."

"Who's he?"

"The queer-looking duck."

George feared no such rival; he laughed loudly. "I suppose he's some old widower," he said, the object thus described seeming ignominious enough to a person of eighteen, without additional characterization.

Lucy became serious at once. "Yes, he is a widower," she said. "I ought to have told you before; he's my father."

George stopped laughing abruptly. "Well, that's a horse on me. If I'd known he was your father of course I wouldn't have made fun of him. I'm sorry."

"Nobody could make fun of him," she said quietly.

"Why couldn't they?"

"It wouldn't make him funny: it would only make himself silly."

Upon this George had a gleam of intelligence. "Well, I'm not going to make myself silly any more, then; I don't want to take chances like that with you. But I thought he was the Sharon girls' uncle. He came with them."

"Yes," she said; "I'm always late to everything: I wouldn't let them wait for me. We're visiting the Sharyns."

"About time I knew that! You forget my being so fresh about your father, will you? Of course he's a distinguished-looking man, in a way."

Lucy was still serious. "In a way," she repeated. "You mean, not in your way, don't you?"

George was perplexed. "How do you mean not in your way?"

"People often say 'in a way' and 'rather distinguished looking' or 'rather so-and-so,' or 'rather anything,' to show that they're superior, don't they? It's a kind of snob slang, I think. Of course people don't always say 'rather' or 'in a way' to be superior."

"I should say not! I use both of 'em a great deal myself," said George. "One thing I don't see, though: What's the use of a man being six feet three? Men that size can't handle themselves as well as a man about five feet eleven and a half can." George was a straightforward soul.



"Are You Engaged to Anybody?"

at least. "See here!" he said. "Are you engaged to anybody?"

"No."

Not wholly mollified, he shrugged his shoulders. "You seem to know a good many people! Do you live in New York?"

"No. We don't live anywhere."

"What do you mean: you don't live anywhere?"

"We've lived all over," she answered. "Papa used to live here in this town, but that was before I was born."

"What do you keep moving around so far? Is he a promoter?"

"No. He's an inventor."

"What's he invented?"

"Just lately," said Lucy, "he's been working on a new kind of horseless carriage."

"Well, I'm sorry for him," George said, in no unkindly spirit. "Those things are never going to amount to anything. People aren't going to spend their lives lying on their backs in the road and letting grease drip in their faces."

"Papa'd be so grateful," she returned, "if he could have your advice."

Instantly George's face became flushed. "I don't know that I've done anything to be insulted for!" he said. "I don't see that what I said was particularly fresh."

"No, indeed!"

"Then what do you—"

She laughed gayly. "I don't! And I don't mind your being such a lofty person at all. I think it's ever so interesting—but papa's a great man!"

"Is he?" George decided to be good-natured. "Well, let us hope so. I hope so, I'm sure."

Looking at him keenly, she saw that the magnificent youth was incredibly sincere in this bit of graciousness. She shook her head in gentle wonder. "I'm just beginning to understand," she said.

"Understand what?"

"What it means to be a real Amberson in this town. Papa told me something about it before we came, but I see he didn't say half enough!"

George superbly took this all for tribute. "Did your father say he knew the family before he left here?"

"Yes. I believe he was particularly a friend of your Uncle George; and he didn't say so, but I imagine he must have known your mother very well, too. He wasn't an inventor then; he was a young lawyer. The town was smaller in those days, and I believe he was quite well known."

"I dare say. I've no doubt the family are all very glad to see him back, especially if they used to have him at the house a good deal, as he told you."

"I don't think he meant to boast of it," she said. "He spoke quite calmly," she retorted, as her partner for the next dance arrived.

She took wing away on the breeze of the waltz, and George, having stared gloomily after her for a few moments, postponed filling an engagement, and strolled round the fluctuating outskirts of the dance to where his uncle, George Amberson, stood smilingly watching, under one of the rose-vine arches at the entrance to the room.

"Hello, young namesake," said the uncle. "Why lingers the laggard heel of the dancer? Haven't you got a partner?"

"She's sitting around waiting for me somewhere," said George. "See here: Who is this fellow Morgan that Aunt Fanny Minafer was dancing with a while ago?"

Amberson laughed. "He's a man with a pretty daughter, George. He seemed to you've been spending the evening noticing something of that sort—or do I err?"

"Never mind! What sort is he?"

"I think we'll have to give him a character, George. He's an old friend; used to practice law here—perhaps he had more debts than cases, but he paid 'em all up before he left town. Your question is purely mercenary, I take it; you want to know his true worth before proceeding further with the daughter. I cannot inform you, though I notice signs of considerable prosperity in that becoming dress of hers. However, you never can tell. It is an age when every sacrifice is made for the young, and how your own poor mother managed to provide those genuine pearl studs for you out of her allowance from father I can't say."

"Oh, dry up!" said the nephew. "I understand this Morgan—"

"Mr. Eugene Morgan," his uncle suggested. "Politeness requires that the young should—"

"I guess the 'young' didn't know much about politeness in your day," George interrupted. "I understand that Mr. Eugene Morgan used to be a great friend of the family. The way he was dancing with Aunt Fanny—"

Amberson laughed. "I'm afraid your Aunt Fanny's heart was stirred by ancient recollections, George."

"You meant she used to be silly about him?"

"She wasn't considered singular," said the uncle. "He was—he was popular. Could you bear a question?"

"What do you mean: could I bear—"

"I only wanted to ask: Do you take this same passionate interest in the parents of every girl you dance with? Perhaps it's a new fashion we old bachelors ought to take up. Is it the thing this year to—"

"Oh, go on!" said George, moving away. "I only wanted to know—" He left the sentence unfinished, and crossed the room to where a girl sat waiting for his nobility to find time to fulfill his contract with her for this dance.

"Pardon I keep wait," he muttered, as she rose brightly to meet him; and she seemed pleased that he came at all. He danced with her perfunctorily, thinking the while of Mr. Eugene Morgan and his daughter. Strangely enough his thoughts dwelt more upon the father than the daughter, though George could not possibly have given a reason—even to himself—for this disturbing preponderance.

By a coincidence, though not an odd one, the thoughts and conversation of Mr. Eugene Morgan at this very time were concerned with George Amberson Minafer, rather casually, it is true. Mr. Morgan had retired to a room set apart for smokers somewhere, said George. "See here: Who is this fellow Morgan that Aunt Fanny Minafer was dancing with a while ago?"

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than set it inside any Amberson house or any place else where young George is."

"Do people like young Minafer generally?"

"I don't know about 'generally.' I guess he gets plenty of toadying; but there's certainly a lot of people that are glad to express their opinions about him."

"What's the matter with him?"

"Too much Amberson, I suppose, for one thing. And for another, his mother just fell down and worshipped him from the day he was born. He thinks he's a little tin god on wheels—and honestly it makes some people weak and sick just to think about him! Yet that high-spirited, intelligent woman, Isabel Amberson, actually sits and worships him! You can hear it in her voice when she speaks to him or speaks of him. You can see it in her eyes when she looks at him. My Lord! What does she see when she looks at him?"

Morgan's odd expression of genial apprehension deepened whimsically. "She sees something that we don't see," he said.

"What does she see?"

"An angel."

Kinney laughed aloud. "Well, if she sees an angel when she looks at George Minafer she's a funnier woman than I thought she was!"

"Perhaps she is," said Morgan. "But that's what she sees."

"My Lord! It's easy to see you've only known him an hour or so. In that time have you looked at George and seen an angel?"

"No. All I saw was a remarkably good-looking fool-boy with the pride of Satan and a set of nice new drawing-room manners that he probably couldn't use more than half an hour at a time without busting."

"Then what?"

"Mothers are right," said Morgan. "Mothers see the angel in us because the angel is there. If it's shown to the mother the son has got an angel to show, hasn't he? When a son cuts somebody's throat the mother only sees it's possible for a misguided angel to act like a devil—and she's entirely right about that!"

Kinney laughed and put his hand on his friend's shoulder. "I remember what a fellow you always were to argue," he said. "You mean George Minafer is as much of an angel as any murderer is, and that George's mother is always right?"

"I'm afraid she always has been," Morgan said lightly.

The friendly hand remained upon his shoulder. "She was wrong once, old fellow. At least, so it seemed to me."

"No," said Morgan, a little awkwardly. "No—"

Kinney relieved the slight embarrassment that had come upon both of them: he laughed again. "Wait till you know young George a little better," he said. "Something tells me you're going to change your mind about having an angel to show, if you see anything of him!"

"You mean beauty's in the eye of the beholder, and the angel is all in the eye of the mother. If you were a painter, Fred, you'd paint mothers with angels' eyes holding lumps in their laps. Me, I'll stick to the old masters and the cherubs."

Mr. Kinney looked at him musingly. "Somebody's eyes must have been pretty angelic," he said, "if they've been persuading you that George Minafer is a cherub!"

"They are," said Morgan heartily. "They're more angelic than ever." And as a new flourish of music sounded overhead he threw away his cigarette and jumped up briskly. "Good-by; I've got this dance with her."

"With whom?"

"With Isabel!"

The grizzled Mr. Kinney affected to rub his eyes. "It startles me, your jumping up like that to go and dance with Isabel Amberson! Twenty years seem to have passed—but have they? Tell me, have you danced with poor old Fanny, too, this evening?"

"Twice!"

"My Lord!" Kinney groaned half in earnest. "Old times starting all over again! My Lord!"

"Old times?" Morgan laughed gayly from the doorway. "Not a bit! There aren't any old times. When times are gone they're not old; they're dead! There aren't any times but new times!"

And he vanished in such a manner that he seemed already to have begun dancing.

CHAPTER VI.

The appearance of Miss Lucy Morgan the next day, as she sat in George's fast cutter, proved so charming that her escort was stiffened to soft words instantly and failed to control a poetic impulse. "You look like—" he said. "Your face looks like—it looks like a snowflake on a lump of coal. I mean a—snowflake that would be a rose-leaf too!"

"Perhaps you'd better look at the reins," she returned. "We almost upset just then."

George declined to heed this advice. "Because there's too much pink in your cheeks for a snowflake," he continued. "What's that fairy story about snow-white and rose-red?"

"We're going pretty fast, Mr. Minafer!"

"Well, you see, I'm only here for two weeks."

"I mean the sleigh!" she explained. "We're not the only people on the street, you know."

"Oh, they'll keep out of the way."

"That's very patrician chariotteering, but it seems to me a horse like this needs guidance. I'm sure he's going almost twenty miles an hour."



"There's Your Grandfather Now," Said Lucy.

the open window afforded the occupants of the cutter a glimpse of a tired, fine old face, a silk hat, a pearl earring and an astrachan collar, evidently out to take the air.

"There's your grandfather now," said Lucy. "Isn't it?"

George's frown was not relaxed. "Yes, it is; and he ought to give that rat trap away and sell those old horses. They're a disgrace, all shaggy—not even clipped. I suppose he doesn't notice it—people get awful funny when they get old; they seem to lose their self-respect, sort of."

"He seemed a real Brummell to me," she said.